

Praxis: Fourth Generation Warfare (NOT for Dummies)



1. *Survival.*
2. *To convince the enemy's political decision makers that their goals are either unachievable or too costly for the perceived benefit.*

-- Wikipedia.

I have received over the past few months more than a few emails asking me to define the term "Fourth Generation Warfare." Today, with a H/T to Larry at KABA for reminding me by posting [this link](http://www.d-n-i.net/dni/strategy-and-force-employment/fourth-generation-warfare-manuals/), (<http://www.d-n-i.net/dni/strategy-and-force-employment/fourth-generation-warfare-manuals/>), I'm going to give you a brief outline of 4GW and then the links to pursue other reading.

The first question that most folks raise is, "what were the other three generations?" William S. Lind provides the best short description in **this article**, (<http://www.lewrockwell.com/lind/lind26.html>), The Four Generations of Modern War from 2004. An excerpt:

The First Generation of modern war began with the Peace of Westphalia in 1648, which ended the Thirty Years War. It also marked the state's assumption of a monopoly on war; thereafter, war became something waged by states, for *raison d'état*, with state armies and navies doing the fighting. The First

Generation ran from 1648 to about the time of the American Civil War, and it was characterized, on the whole, by a battlefield of order. The battlefield of order created a military culture of order, which endures to this day.

And there's the rub. For around the middle of the 19th century, the battlefield of order began to break down. Ever since, state militaries have had to grapple with a growing contradiction between their internal culture of order and the external reality of an increasingly disordered battlefield.

The Second and Third Generations represent two different approaches to that problem. Second Generation war was developed by the French Army during and after World War I, and is best summed up with the French saying, "The artillery conquers, the infantry occupies." Also known as firepower/attrition warfare, Second Generation war maintained the First Generation culture of order. Decision-making was centralized and hierarchical; orders were detailed and controlling, to permit synchronization of all arms; time was not particularly important; and success was measured by comparative body counts. Second Generation armed forces focus inward on methods, processes and procedures, prize obedience over initiative (initiative and synchronization are not compatible) and depend on imposed discipline. The American Army and Marine Corps learned Second Generation war from the French during the First World War and still practice it today, with exceptions based on individual commanders.

Third Generation war, also known as maneuver warfare, was developed by the German Army in World War I; by 1918, Blitzkrieg was conceptually complete, lacking only the tanks necessary for operational mobility. The Prussian/German roots of Third Generation war go back earlier, to the Scharnhorst reforms that followed Prussia's defeat by Napoleon. One of those reforms changed what was required of a Prussian officer; instead of being responsible for obeying orders, he became responsible for getting the result the situation required regardless of orders (in 19th century war games, it was common for junior Prussian officers to be given problems that could only be solved by disobeying orders). This in turn created a military culture that was focused outward, on the enemy, the situation and the result the situation demanded instead of inward on rules, orders and processes. In effect, Prussia had broken with the First Generation culture of order.

The new Third Generation tactics developed by the Germans in World War I were the first non-linear tactics. On the defense, the objective became sucking the enemy in, then cutting him off, rather than holding a line. On the offensive, the attack flowed like water through the enemy's defenses, always seeking the weakest point to penetrate, then rolling him up from his own rear forward. Operationally as well as tactically the goal was usually encirclement. Speed replaced firepower as the most important tool, and dislocation, mental as well as physical, was more important than attrition. Culturally, not only was the German Army outward-focused, it prized initiative over obedience and it depended on self-discipline rather than imposed discipline.

Much of the American military reform movement of the 1970s, 80s and early 90s was an attempt to move the American armed forces from the Second to the Third Generation. While the Marine Corps formally adopted maneuver warfare as doctrine in the 1990s, most of what the Marine Corps does remains Second Generation. The other American services remain almost wholly Second Generation, to the frustration of many junior officers.

Fourth Generation war is the greatest change since the Peace of Westphalia, because it marks the end of the state's monopoly on war. Once again, as before 1648, many different entities, not states, are fighting war. They use many different means, including "terrorism" and immigration, not just formal armies. Differences between cultures, not just states, become paramount, and other cultures will not fight the way we fight. All over the world, state militaries are fighting non-state opponents, and almost always, the state is losing. State militaries were designed to fight other state militaries like themselves, and against non-state enemies most of their equipment, tactics and training are useless or counterproductive.

Ok, so now we have the basics. Attrition warfare, bad. Maneuver warfare, much better. 4GW is maneuver warfare adapted to the abilities and resources of the weak.

Now, there is a body of work known as "The Canon of 4GW," which is a list of seven books that cover the subject in depth. These are:

The Enlightened Soldiers by C.E. White

The Seeds of Disaster by Robert Doughty

Stormtroop Tactics by Robert Gudmundsson

Command or Control? by Martin Samuels

The Breaking Point by Robert Doughty

The Transformation of War by Martin Creveld

It is not necessary to go broke buying books to understand 4GW however. Thanks to the folks at **Defense and the National Interest**, (<http://www.d-n-i.net/dni/about/>) we have many important documents of 4GW posted where they can easily be accessed.

DNI's stated purpose is "to foster debate on the roles of the U.S. armed forces in the post-Cold War era and on the resources devoted to them. The ultimate purpose is to help create a more effective national defense against the types of threats we will likely face during the first decades of the new millennium. Contributors to this site are, with a few exceptions, active/reserve, former, or retired military. They often combine a knowledge of military theory with the practical experience that comes from trying their ideas in the field."

The particular article that Larry at KABA drew our interest to (first link above) is this:

4GW Manuals

Produced by the Fourth Generation Warfare Seminar at the Marine Corps Base, Quantico:

1. FMFM 1A, **Fourth Generation Warfare**, Draft 4.3, 10 February 2009 (598 KB PDF) (http://www.d-n-i.net/fcs/pdf/fmfm_1-a.pdf)
2. FMFM 1-3A, **A Tactical Handbook for Counterinsurgency and Police Operations**, Draft 1.0, 12 August 2008 (158 KB PDF) (http://www.d-n-i.net/fcs/pdf/fmfm_1-3a_police.pdf)
3. FMFM 1A-3A, **A Book of 4GW Tactical Decision Games**, 3 October 2008 (95 pp, 2.5 MB PDF) (http://www.d-n-i.net/fcs/pdf/4gw_tdg_manual_9-2008.pdf)
4. **Light Infantry**, 24 September 2008 (495 KB PDF) (http://www.d-n-i.net/fcs/pdf/light_infantry_for_4gw.pdf)

The original paper, "**The Changing Face of War: Into the Fourth Generation**," from the 1989 Marine Corps Gazette. (http://www.d-n-i.net/fcs/4th_gen_war_gazette.htm)

For other 4GW resources, please visit our 4GW Pages:

4GW Theory (<http://www.d-n-i.net/dni/strategy-and-force-employment/fourth-generation-warfare->

theory/)

Other 4GW Articles (<http://www.d-n-i.net/dni/strategy-and-force-employment/fourth-generation-warfare-articles/>)

So go to the site and the various links and learn about 4GW. Small unit commanders whose ambitions are not so lofty will find more of immediate value in previously recommended works on maneuver warfare such as Poole's *The Last Hundred Yards*.

But mind this: the side that wins the upcoming American civil war will be the one that best understands and implements the principles of 4GW.

Posted by **Dutchman6** at 7:14 AM